



Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea

Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Christopher Robbins Creates Brooms at Kentucky Artisan Center

Release Date

Feb. 19, 2013

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BEREA, Ky. – On Saturday, March 2, Christopher Robbins of Berea will demonstrate broom making from 10:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.

At the age of 14, Christopher Robbins began working in the Broom Shop at the Bittersweet Cabins in Renfro Valley, Ky., where he developed a love of broom making. Robbins then had the good fortune of meeting master broom maker Jim Harmon, of Springfield, Ky. who helped Robbins refine his skills and acquire the equipment needed to produce brooms.

Robbins makes all of his brooms either totally by hand or with the assistance of 100+ year-old broom making equipment. He uses a 100-year-old winder that was constructed with wooden pegs to attach the broomcorn to the broom handle. His vice, which is used to tie the brooms, is dated Sept. 10, 1878.

Broomcorn, used to make brooms, is a member of the millet family. This tall plant has little foliage and woody stocks, but looks somewhat like sweet corn. It produces bristles laden with seeds rather than an ear of seed and these bristles are processed after drying in multiple ways depending on how they will be used in producing brooms, brushes, or floral arrangements.

In 2002, Robbins was juried into the Kentucky Crafted Marketing Program – one of the youngest craftsmen ever to be awarded this honor. He is also a juried member of the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen and the Shelton Artisan Guild. Robbins says, "It feels good to be knowledgeable and able to carry on the art of such an old craft."

In 2010, Robbins was hired by Berea College to head and run the college's Broomcraft Program. This College Student Crafts Program is one of many labor departments and learning environments in which Berea College students work as part of their liberal arts education. Broomcraft has been a part of the Berea College Student Craft Program since 1920 when equipment from a broom factory was given to the college.

Brooms by Christopher Robbins are regularly available at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea, located at 200 Artisan Way, just off Interstate -75 at Berea Exit 77. The center's exhibits, shopping and travel information areas are open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the cafe is open from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Admission is free.

The center currently features works by more than 650 artisans from more than 100 counties all across the Commonwealth. A special exhibit, "The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea: Celebrating Ten Years," will open on March 2. This exhibit which runs through Aug. 24, celebrates the center's 10th Anniversary year and recognizes the works of 50 Kentucky artisans who have exhibited and sold their works at the Center since it opened in July of 2003. For information about the center's events call 859-985-5448, visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/kentucky.artisan.center, or go to the center's website at www.kentuckyartisancenter.ky.gov.

The Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea is an agency in the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.



Christopher Robbins creates functional brooms at the Kentucky Artisan Center at Berea.